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Central Intelligence Agency

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Guatemala: Rios Montt in Firmer Control

President Rios Montt has strengthened his hold on power. He removed an imminent threat by arresting former officers and civilians involved in coup plotting. But his political support from the military is ultimately conditional on his performance against the guerrillas. [redacted]

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Rios Montt's counterinsurgency strategy of active patrolling in guerrilla strongholds combined with developmental assistance to peasant villages has been highly effective. More than 50,000 peasants are organized in civil defense units to defend their villages from guerrilla attack. The Army has reasserted control in many areas dominated by the insurgents six months ago.

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The military is short on supplies, however, and will have to cut back its effort over the next several months. The insurgents have been lying low to avoid encounters with the Army, and many have probably crossed into Mexico for safehaven. They may step up their activity once the military effort winds down. [redacted]

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Rios Montt's timetable for a return to constitutional rule will ease political party and international criticism of his failure to move toward new elections. The government will decree new laws next March laying the groundwork for a late 1984 constituent assembly election. A general presidential election is not planned until early 1986, but the process may be speeded up to win greater public support. [redacted]

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